



Old Kent Road Community Review Panel

Report of Community Review: 79-161 Ilderton Road

Monday 25 November 2024
231 Old Kent Road, London, SE1 5LU

Panel

Gurmeet Sian (chair)
Shelene Byer
Rahul Mani
Saidat Oketunde
David Stoker
Madison Westwood

Attendees

Patrick Cronin	London Borough of Southwark
Tim Cutts	London Borough of Southwark
Yingli Tang	Frame Projects

Apologies / copied to

Jessica Potter	London Borough of Southwark
Colin Wilson	London Borough of Southwark
Tom Bolton	Frame Projects

Confidentiality

This is a pre-application review, and therefore confidential. As a public organisation the London Borough of Southwark is subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOI) and, in the case of an FOI request, may be obliged to release project information submitted for review.

1. Project name and site address

79-161 Ilderton Road, London, SE16 3JZ

2. Presenting team

Emma Stonard	SLR Consulting
Ronan Farrell	Tide Construction
Helen McManus	Tide Construction
Nenad Manasijevic	TP Bennett
Petra Montuschi	TP Bennett
Julie Wilmer	TP Bennett

3. Planning authority briefing

The site is located within the site allocation OKR16, which expects any redevelopment of the site to provide new homes, replace existing employment floorspace, enable new east-to-west walking and cycling links, and potentially provide a new cut-through pedestrian connection from the north of Ilderton Road through the arch at South Bermondsey Station.

The Old Kent Road Area Action Plan (AAP) expects any redevelopment on this site to deliver a residential-led development. Retail, community, and education uses may also be provided. The AAP expects this development to incorporate off-street servicing and deliver a new pocket park at the centre of the plot. There is also an adopted Design Code.

The applicant benefits from an extant planning permission for redevelopment to provide two separate buildings containing 605 dwellings as co-living studios, 120 conventional residential flats, commercial floorspace and landscaping.

The alternative scheme now proposed would deliver 865 co-living studios and 186 conventional residential flats, with all of the latter being social rented homes (equating to 37 per cent affordable housing overall). This would be provided across four blocks ranging from 28 to 10 storeys. The homes would all be supported by play and communal space for the future residents. Three commercial units are proposed, and one is sized to be suitable for occupation by a convenience store. The scheme would incorporate a centrally located public park. It would also provide delivery and servicing facilities along Ilderton Road, cycle storage, and on-site Blue Badge parking.

Officers asked for the panel's comments on how well the proposal maintains the principles of the consented scheme. Views are also sought on the quantum, quality and mix of residential accommodation, optimisation of the site, impact on neighbours, height and massing, amenity spaces, and landscaping.

4. Community Review Panel's views

Summary

The Old Kent Road Community Review Panel has significant concerns about the suitability of the co-living housing proposed for Blocks A and B. While the panel supports the provision of a range of housing types, it does not think that co-living on this scale is healthy or sustainable. It appeals to both the project team and London Borough of Southwark to reconsider this use on the site. The provision of social rented flats is welcome, but tenure types should not be visibly differentiated.

As co-living excludes families, the panel is concerned that it will not meet the needs of the borough, and will create a transient community that does not integrate or contribute locally. The long-term impact and appeal of this relatively new typology has yet to be tested at such a large scale, and there is a risk of too many developments offering this type of living in the area. The panel also questions whether single aspect studios are liveable. If a co-living scheme is built, it thinks that a smaller scheme with a mix of studio sizes would be more likely to create a strong, balanced community.

The arrival experience for residents needs further work across all blocks. Windows should be designed to maximise privacy, minimise overheating, and be easy to clean. Homes should also provide sufficient storage. The panel supports the off-site modular construction system, as it has multiple benefits including acoustic performance.

The proposed height and massing are acceptable given the wider emerging context, and the reduction in the podium height is successful. The panel enjoys the detailing of the façades, which draws on the local context. The provision of commercial space is welcome, but independent local businesses should be given priority. The panel also suggests a community space to encourage social interaction. Proposed planting in the shared amenity spaces and pocket park is positive, but maintenance will be crucial to their success. The panel emphasises that spaces should be safe and inviting for people of all ages, and at different times of the day.

Principle of co-living use

- The panel understands the market demand for co-living, generated by the unaffordability of housing in London, and viability pressures on developers. However, it considers co-living to be a symptom of, rather than a solution to, these issues.
- The amount of development proposed appears to be led by viability considerations. Although it could be a worthwhile experiment on a much smaller scale, the panel considers the size of this development to be beyond the limits of the current research into the success of the co-living model.

- By virtue of offering a single-occupancy product, co-living excludes families, creating natural churn and encouraging transient communities that do not integrate or give back to the area.
- The panel recognises that this scheme will also provide 40 per cent social rented conventional flats in Blocks C and D, and that co-living will contribute to Southwark's housing targets. However, the majority of those with greatest priority on the housing waiting lists require family accommodation, and co-living will not meet this need.
- In the panel's view, people want the opportunity to own their own homes, rather than to rent, and to be able to stay in the area they call home when they find a partner or choose to start a family. If this were affordable, it would help to ensure a stable and long-term community in Old Kent Road, which should be a priority for the Council and the project team.
- There are concerns that the co-living model has not yet been tested in the long term, and the market could collapse. It is also noted that another co-living scheme and a student housing scheme are coming forward nearby. The panel questions whether there will be demand for so much of this type of living in the immediate vicinity in years to come.
- The co-living typology produces buildings with long, narrow corridors and almost exclusively single aspect studios. The panel acknowledges the provision of well-considered shared amenity spaces, but questions how positive co-living is for resident health and well-being, especially as its impact has not yet been assessed over the long term.
- It will be challenging to create a cohesive community with 865 co-living studios, and the panel thinks it is likely to feel more like a hotel. If a co-living scheme is brought forward on this site, the scale should be reconsidered to find a socially optimum size to create a strong community.
- It may be helpful to explore a flagship co-living scheme, such as Helen & Hard's Vindmøllebakken in Stavanger, Norway, which has 40 studios to ensure that everyone can get to know each other.
- The panel would be more comfortable with co-living on a large scale if there were a wider mix of studio sizes. The development should be open to couples as a minimum (and sized appropriately). Although the panel appreciates the policy constraints from the Greater London Authority, it thinks that this approach would not only create a less transient community but would also lead to better occupancy levels.
- If family-sized studios were possible, they should be mixed throughout the blocks rather than located on the same floors.

- Further work is needed on the programming of the communal spaces and initiatives to help co-living residents to get to know each other. An example is a 'swap and share' clothes borrowing initiative that could help people to meet like-minded residents.
- These initiatives require good management, but would be in the interest of the co-living operator as they would spread positive publicity about the development.
- The panel understands that the language used to describe co-living was not invented by this project team, but is concerned that it is not an accurate framing for the accommodation being provided. This language was originally developed for the co-housing model, which differs from co-living because residents decide on their shared values and take responsibility for governance (rather than having an external operator), creating an invested, long-term community.
- The panel recommends taking care when applying the language of co-housing to co-living, to avoid coming across as insincere or being misunderstood.

Quality of residential accommodation

- Across all tenures, the panel asks that rental tenants are protected from extreme increases in service charges where possible, as this will help people to remain in the area.
- Further work is required on the arrival and circulation experience, especially for the co-living blocks. This could be improved with corridors of a more generous width; by checking that the entrances are welcoming; and by making individual front doors identifiable.
- The panel also notes that the whole community will be affected by the maintenance standard for shared circulation and entrance spaces. It will therefore be important to set standards that are high enough to create and maintain the feeling of having entered a residence.
- The panel welcomes the decision not to use full height glazing, which often leads to residents erecting unsightly privacy screens or frosting. This could still happen on the balconies, particularly on the lower, more exposed levels. The proposal should provide enough privacy to discourage self-adaptations.
- While the window positions have been carefully designed to ensure compliant overlooking distances, the panel is concerned that there could still be privacy issues. Views into neighbouring flats should be limited or mitigated against as far as possible.

- The project team is also asked to specify windows that are easy to clean and maintain - especially important in the UK climate.
- The internal layouts of all homes would benefit from additional storage space. The project team should consider where residents will be able to keep larger items, such as a vacuum cleaner.
- The waste strategy is not yet clear, but should avoid creating spaces where residents will feel encased in small, unpleasant-smelling cupboards. Rubbish chutes could offer a solution.
- It is positive that the off-site modular construction system has multiple benefits, including increased acoustic protection between walls. The panel notes that this will help promote neighbourly relations and resident well-being. It is also reassuring to hear that the construction system has built-in adaptability in case of changes to the design or unexpected issues on site.

Height and massing

- The proposal will increase the height and massing of the blocks. However, given the much larger, taller developments nearby that already have planning consent, the panel understands the strategy of stepping up toward this emerging context.
- The panel supports the reduction in height of the podium level, which helps the buildings to appear less bulky and brutalist.

Architecture

- The panel is concerned about the clear visual distinction in the external appearance of the socially rented blocks (C and D) compared to the co-living blocks (A and B). This comes across as a divided estate, and could lead to stigmatisation of those living in socially rented homes.
- The panel is also concerned that the difference in tenures could become more apparent with time if there are varying standards of maintenance provided by the co-living operators versus the social housing registered providers.
- The risk that social rented residents feel neglected should be minimised through design for the best chance of creating a cohesive community.
- The panel recommends having a unified external appearance across all blocks, especially in terms of colour and materials. There could still be some differences in the elevation detailing to provide variety.

- This aside, the panel enjoys the scheme's overall aesthetic, particularly the detailing of aluminium surrounds. It also likes the way lintel and brickwork details have drawn on the local existing context.

Community facilities

- The provision of ground floor commercial space in a range of sizes is welcomed. This development will introduce a significant amount of people to the area who, combined with the existing population, are likely to have sufficient spending power to support a successful retail offer.
- The unit intended for a convenience store will be useful to residents. The panel asks that local businesses are prioritised over the large chain supermarkets that are ubiquitous on high streets.
- Similarly, the panel would prefer the other commercial units to be occupied by local independent cafés or shops, rather than national brands.
- As well as helping residents with cost of living, this will help existing businesses to survive, maintain more of the area's unique identity, and help the development to integrate into the current local community.
- Community engagement should be carried out to attract local entrepreneurs. The panel also suggests using these commercial spaces as testbeds to find out what type of tenants will be most successful here. This could be organised as an indoor market with many small businesses – similar to Mercato Metropolitano, but on a smaller scale.
- To encourage social interaction, the panel asks for an internal community space in addition to the commercial units; and for further thought on the function or activity programme that would help to build a sense of community.
- In the panel's experience, there is a lack of spaces in the immediate vicinity that families can book to host a children's birthday party or similar occasion. A shared laundry facility could also be successful and sociable. The acoustics of the space will need careful consideration.

Amenity and landscaping

- The panel asks for a long-term maintenance strategy, clarifying who is responsible for the upkeep of each area. Planting should also be low-maintenance, using species that do not easily dry out or become overgrown.
- The panel recommends further thinking on how the public pocket park can be designed to be usable and feel safe during the darker winter months.

- The indoor and outdoor communal spaces should be designed for all ages. This should include activities for teenagers and quieter spaces for adults to enjoy, as well as children's play space.
- To encourage sustainable and active travel, the bicycle storage facilities should be easy to access and inviting to use.
- The panel notes that micromobility transport options, such as e-scooters, are increasingly popular. To avoid circulation spaces becoming cluttered, storage space should be provided for these forms of transport too.
- While the balance between landscaping and parking is understood, the panel thinks that the number of Blue Badge spaces will not be sufficient, and asks that one or two more are added if space allows.

Sustainability

- The project team is asked to design the scheme to be as sustainable as possible, ensuring that the homes will be fit for future living.
- This should include consideration of internal thermal comfort for residents, and the potential for extreme temperatures. In the panel's experience, those living in new build developments often suffer from overheating in the summer due to excessive solar gain and inadequate ventilation.
- The scheme should allow for windows to be openable as far as possible (bearing child safety in mind) to maximise natural ventilation, alongside mechanical ventilation where necessary.

Next steps

- The Old Kent Road Community Review Panel would welcome the opportunity to review the scheme again if helpful to officers.